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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women

Follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution 53/120 of 9 December 1998, requested the Secretary-General to report annually to it, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, on follow-up to and progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Similar mandates were also contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/203, 51/69 and 52/100. The present report emphasizes efforts undertaken by the Secretariat in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective and follow-up activities, including activities undertaken by non-governmental organizations, since the submission of the previous report of the Secretary-General on the subject (E/CN.6/1998/2 and Add.1 and 2). It contains a joint work plan for the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The present report has one addendum, which contains an analysis of additional national action plans and strategies submitted to the Secretariat during the reporting period.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 1996/6 on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Economic and Social Council established the work programme of the Commission on the Status of Women and decided, *inter alia*, that under item 3 (a) of the Commission's agenda, a report of the Secretary-General on the measures taken and progress achieved in mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system should be prepared on an annual basis.

2. In its resolution 53/120, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to it, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council on follow-up to and progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Similar mandates were contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/203, 51/69 and 52/100.

3. In each of the three reports submitted in the course of a year, the information that is most pertinent to the respective intergovernmental body is provided. The report to the Commission on the Status of Women emphasizes efforts undertaken by the Secretariat in support of gender mainstreaming, and follow-up activities by non-governmental organizations and others. The report to the Economic and Social Council focuses on facilitating the coordination function of the Council. The report to the General Assembly contains information from all entities of the United Nations system, including specialized agencies and international financial institutions, and an analysis of activities undertaken at the national level and by non-governmental organizations and civil society.

4. The present report has been prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 53/120. Section III contains a joint work plan for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, as called for in Commission on the Status of Women resolution 39/5. Section IV has been prepared in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/10 on Palestinian women and Commission on the Status of Women resolution 42/2 on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts, including those subsequently imprisoned.

5. The addendum (E/CN.6/1999/2/Add.1) to the present report contains an analysis of an additional 20 national action plans and strategies submitted to the Secretariat in response to a note verbale dated 2 July 1998, which was sent to Member States. This updates the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session, in March 1998, entitled "Synthesized report on national action plans and strategies for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action" (E/CN.6/1998/6).

II. Progress in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and in mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system

6. At its forty-third session, the Commission on the Status of Women will continue to conduct its assessment of progress achieved at different levels in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and in gender mainstreaming. In particular, it will conclude its review of the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action with an assessment of women and health, and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. It will also initiate the comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action and preparations for the special session of the General Assembly, to take place from 5 to 9 June 2000. The present report complements the reports submitted on those topics.

A. The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council

1. Fifty-third session of the General Assembly

7. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/53/308) focused on follow-up activities undertaken by entities of the United Nations system, including human and financial requirements for implementation. In its conclusions, the report drew attention to Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 and the follow-up resolution adopted by the Council (resolution 1998/43) on gender mainstreaming as a firm basis for concrete steps to achieve measurable progress in gender mainstreaming at all levels and in all areas. It further concluded that a broader assessment including indicators of and recommendations for further action with regard to capacity-building for gender mainstreaming at the national level remained to be made. The Commission's consideration of the critical area of concern IV.H (Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women) at its present

session provides an opportunity to address this issue on a priority basis.

8. The General Assembly, in its resolution 53/120, emphasized the need for further steps by the Secretary-General and by intergovernmental bodies to implement Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 and resolutions 1998/43 and 1998/26 (concerning operational activities and the advancement of women). In this regard, the Secretariat was once again requested to present issues and approaches in a gender-sensitive manner when preparing reports so as to provide the intergovernmental machinery with an analytical basis for gender-responsive policy formulation. The Assembly requested that a gender perspective be integrated into all operational activities and stressed the role of resident coordinators in this regard. The Council was requested to ensure that gender mainstreaming was an integral part of all its activities concerning integrated follow-up to recent United Nations conferences. In its resolution 53/192 on the triennial policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, the Assembly identified gender as a cross-cutting theme and requested the Secretary-General and the United Nations development system to take all measures to ensure gender balance when making appointments. It also stressed the need for gender mainstreaming in operational activities of the United Nations system in all fields, in particular in support of poverty eradication.

9. The Assembly continued to provide guidance for the preparations of the special session in the year 2000 (resolution 53/120). It decided that the title of the special session would be "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". It invited the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the preparatory committee for the special session to propose the agenda (structure and themes) and documentation for the special session, taking into account Assembly resolution 52/231. It also invited the Commission to focus in particular on the report requested from the Secretary-General containing suggestions on further actions and initiatives that might be considered during the review in order to achieve gender equality, with attention to mainstreaming a gender perspective and to common trends and themes across the 12 critical areas of concern. This report is before the Commission in document E/CN.6/1999/PC/2.

10. The Assembly emphasized the role of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Platform for Action and the need for their active involvement in preparations for the special session, as well as the need to ensure appropriate arrangements for their contributions to the special session. Specifically, it recommended to the Council the extension of the application to the forty-third session of the Commission of the interim measures for the participation of non-governmental organizations, contained in Council decision 1997/298. Furthermore, the Assembly invited the Commission on the Status of Women, meeting as the preparatory committee in March 1999, to recommend to the General Assembly appropriate arrangements for the involvement and participation of non-governmental organizations in the special session. Accordingly, the Commission meeting as the preparatory committee may wish to consider at its present session the question of NGO participation in the special session so that a decision may be taken by the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

11. The Assembly also recommended to the Economic and Social Council to decide that non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council, as well as non-governmental organizations that participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women whose applications for consultative status with the Council were still under consideration, might participate in the sessions of the Commission meeting as the preparatory committee, in 1999 and 2000. The Secretariat will communicate to the NGO community Council decision 1998/301 concerning the participation of non-governmental organizations in the sessions of the Commission acting as the preparatory committee.

12. The Secretary-General was requested by the Assembly to provide by the end of 1999 a compilation of updated statistics and indicators, including by issuing a volume of *The World's Women*. As no provision for preparing this report had been made in the regular budget, extrabudgetary resources had to be sought. As of 18 December 1998, pledges had been received from the following Governments and United Nations entities: Denmark, Germany, Finland, Iceland, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the World Food Programme (WFP). The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has initiated work on this publication. It is expected to be launched in early 2000.

13. Also in resolution 53/120, the Assembly encouraged Governments to submit responses to the questionnaire prepared by the Secretariat on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The questionnaire was sent to all Governments in a communication of 28 October 1998 inviting replies no later

than 30 April 1999 in order to enable the Secretariat to draw from the responses in preparing for the special session. The questionnaire is also available from the Web site of the Division for the Advancement of Women (www.un.org/womenwatch/daw). Further details on the questionnaire are contained in document E/CN.6/1999/PC/3.

14. Appropriate regional preparatory activities were encouraged, and results are expected to be provided as an input to the Commission at its forty-fourth session, in 2000. In addition to information provided in previous reports (A/52/789 and A/53/308), the following regional preparatory activities have recently taken place or are being planned.

15. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) convened the second follow-up conference to Beijing in collaboration with the League of Arab States and UNIFEM at Beirut from 12 to 15 December 1998. This conference served as the regional preparatory meeting for the special session of the General Assembly in 2000. ESCWA is also convening an Arab conference for the integrated follow-up to United Nations global conferences at Beirut, in December 1999. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) will hold a high-level intergovernmental meeting at Bangkok from 26 to 29 October 1999. The seventh session of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean was held at Santiago from 19 to 21 November 1997 and adopted the "Santiago Consensus" (see A/53/87). The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean will convene the eighth session of the Regional Conference in 2000. On the occasion of its fortieth anniversary, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) held an international conference on the theme "African women and economic development: investing in our future" (April 1998). The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) is holding consultations at the intergovernmental level with a view to convening a meeting of experts which would review issues and policies in the ECE countries as they relate to gender equality and the situation of women in the field of economics. Furthermore, regional preparations for the review of the Beijing Platform for Action will be discussed at the annual regional coordinating meeting established in follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/3 on the review of the regional commissions. The meeting is chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General.

16. In its resolution 52/231, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to invite all entities of the United Nations system, including the specialized agencies, funds and programmes, to be involved actively in preparatory activities and to participate at the highest level in the special session, including through presentations on best practices, obstacles encountered and a vision for the future to accelerate implementation of the Platform for Action and address new and emerging trends. Accordingly, the Secretary-General, in a communication of 20 August 1998, invited heads of specialized agencies, funds and programmes and of regional commissions to participate in the preparations for the special session, and to cooperate with his Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, including in the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, in this endeavour. As of December 1998, 10 heads of agencies have communicated their commitment to the implementation of the Platform for Action and to involvement in the preparations for the special session and in the session itself.

2. Economic and Social Council, substantive session of 1999: high-level segment

17. Action taken by intergovernmental bodies in 1998, in particular the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, has been reported to the Council (E/1998/53). In particular, the Commission's attention is drawn to the decision taken by the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 1998/33 with regard to economic, social and cultural rights. In that resolution, the Commission appointed a Special Rapporteur to focus on the right to education, taking into account gender considerations, in particular the situation and needs of the girl child, and promoting the elimination of all forms of discrimination in education. The Special Rapporteur is expected to report for the first time to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fifth session (22 March–30 April 1999). Any reports that pertain to the situation of women in the field of the right to education will be made available to the Commission on the Status of Women. The report of the Special Rapporteur will also be made available to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its twenty-first session, in 1999.

18. Building upon the Platform for Action and General Assembly resolutions 50/203, 51/69 and 52/100, the Council, in its decision 1998/298, decided that the theme for the high-level segment of its 1999 substantive session would be "The role of employment and work in poverty eradication: the empowerment and advancement of women".

19. The Council's consideration of the topic is expected to benefit from, and to have a substantial impact on, a number of ongoing activities. Most important, the *1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* will be available to support intergovernmental deliberations. The *Survey* will contain a gender analysis of the major global

trends. It will also assess the situation of women in the world of work in the context of globalization. The *Survey* is being prepared in a collaborative effort involving many parts of the United Nations system, under the leadership of the Division for the Advancement of Women. A preliminary executive summary highlighting the major trends and findings is before the Commission in a conference room paper (E/CN.6/1999/CRP.3).

20. Consideration of this topic provides an opportunity for the Council to underline the relevance and impact of gender considerations with regard to employment and poverty eradication, and thus to provide policy guidance, from a gender perspective, for ongoing processes such as the review of the World Summit for Social Development and the system-wide poverty eradication efforts. Building on its recent actions, including its agreed conclusions on poverty eradication of 1996, and on gender mainstreaming of 1997, the Council could further clarify how gender dimensions need to be taken into account in order to make poverty eradication efforts and employment creation policies sustainable and successful, particularly in the context of globalization and economic restructuring.

21. Attention is also drawn to Council decision 1998/290, in which the Council decided, *inter alia*, to hold an informal meeting with panels of experts immediately after its resumed organizational session for 1999. At that meeting, the Council will consider in a comprehensive manner the work being carried out by the United Nations system and other relevant international and national institutions on basic indicators to measure progress towards the implementation of the integrated and coordinated follow-up of all aspects of major United Nations conferences and summits. As the Council will focus, as a first step, on taking stock and identifying overlapping, duplication and gaps in the economic, social and related fields at all levels, the informal meeting provides an opportunity for a critical assessment of the gender responsiveness of such basic indicators. In this regard, the work of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), in particular efforts to mainstream gender considerations into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process, could inform the discussions in the Council. The UNDG Sub-Group on Gender has provided extensive comments and input to the UNDG Working Group on Common Indicators.

B. Activities in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the work of the United Nations system

22. Since the adoption of the Council's agreed conclusions on gender mainstreaming (1997/2) and their subsequent communication by the Secretary-General to all heads of departments, funds, programmes and regional commissions, and to the heads of specialized agencies and international trade and financial institutions (see E/1998/64 for a detailed account of the activities undertaken), the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women has continued to follow up with senior officials throughout the system concerning their implementation. A summary of such activities is provided below.

23. The Special Adviser has continued to work with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in the development of a project on mainstreaming a gender perspective in multidimensional peacekeeping operations. A draft project proposal was made available to interested delegations in mid-1998, and pledges of support were subsequently received from a number of Governments. The project has four major objectives: to analyse the extent to which a gender perspective is reflected in all stages of peacekeeping operations, with a view to strengthening this perspective; to increase the number of women in multidimensional operations at all levels; to assess the impact of peacekeepers on the local population, in particular women; and to review the contribution of local women to peacekeeping and peace support activities. It is anticipated that implementation of the project will commence in early 1999. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has also stepped up its efforts to improve gender balance at Headquarters and in the field.

24. Further follow-up took place with the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The Special Adviser discussed with the Office opportunities for including gender considerations in two ongoing in-depth evaluations (i.e., of disarmament and of electoral assistance). The issuance of the two in-depth evaluations in 1999 for the Committee for Programme and Coordination might provide a good basis for assessing how gender considerations can further inform the work of the Office.

25. A gender advisory group consisting of representatives of all divisions and offices of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and chaired by the Special Adviser was established to support gender mainstreaming in all activities of the Department. Various conference review processes in which the Department has the lead or is a major participant (the International Conference on Population and

Development and the World Summit for Social Development) and the coordinated and integrated follow-up to United Nations conferences are receiving priority attention. Likewise, the gender advisory group is assessing how the Council's and the Assembly's request to present issues and approaches in a gender-sensitive manner when preparing reports can best be implemented in the preparation of the Department's flagship publications, including the *World Economic and Social Survey* and the *Report on the World Social Situation*.

26. In conjunction with her participation in the expert group meeting on national machineries organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women in cooperation with ECLAC (Santiago, 31 August–4 September), the Special Adviser met with the Executive Secretary and with senior staff to review the ongoing efforts of ECLAC to ensure the integration of a gender perspective into its programmes and policies. In particular, ECLAC's ongoing project in this field with the German Development Cooperation Agency (GTZ) and the possibility of replicating it in other regional commissions was discussed, and comparable experiences at United Nations Headquarters, such as the Department of Political Affairs's team building-cum-workshop on gender mainstreaming, were reviewed. The meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss questions of gender balance and of the creation of a gender-sensitive working environment.

27. The Special Adviser's mission to Rome, in conjunction with the workshop on a rights-based approach to women's advancement and empowerment and gender equality (see paras. 39–41 below) allowed her to meet with the Executive Director of WFP, and with senior staff of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). In each case, participation in the preparations for the special session, strengthening of gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes, and questions of gender balance and of a gender-sensitive working environment were discussed. The insights gained from the FAO evaluation of the impact and long-term effect of compulsory gender training conducted agency-wide in 1993 for some 700 technical staff were reviewed and their relevance for the system as a whole discussed.

28. The Special Adviser also seeks to meet with senior United Nations officials who are stationed away from New York whenever they are on mission at Headquarters to discuss follow-up to the Platform for Action, gender mainstreaming and questions of gender balance.

29. Since leading an inter-agency gender mission to Afghanistan in November 1997, the Special Adviser has remained actively involved in the work of the Afghanistan Support Group. The report of the inter-agency mission was approved by the Support Group in December 1997. Some of its recommendations were reviewed by the third meeting of the Support Group, in London, in May 1998. The report was widely distributed and played a catalytic role in raising the awareness of the international community about the situation of women in Afghanistan. It has been taken into account in subsequent inter-agency planning documents concerning humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan and has also been considered by intergovernmental bodies. The Strategic Framework for Afghanistan, defining the principles, goals and institutional arrangements for a more coherent, effective and integrated political strategy and assistance, pointed out that nowhere was the need for an approach based on principles more evident than in the context of gender discrimination in Afghanistan. Two out of five key objectives of the assistance strategy in the Strategic Framework deal with the protection and advancement of human rights, with particular emphasis on gender.

30. A further update of the Special Adviser was reviewed by the Afghanistan Support Group in December 1998. This report, and other recent United Nations reports,[1] insofar as they concern the condition of women, showed that in spite of efforts of United Nations agencies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, supported by the donor community, there is a further deterioration of economic conditions for women; widespread abuses and violations of women's human rights; continued enforcement of discriminatory measures against women; continued violence, including the rape and killing of women; and erosion of respect for women. The political situation on the ground, as well as the consequences of the earthquakes of February and May 1998 and the withdrawal of United Nations international staff from the country for security reasons, affected the implementation of the recommendations of the inter-agency gender mission. At the same time, positive developments include ongoing intergovernmental attention to the situation of women in Afghanistan; visits of high-level persons to Afghanistan, stressing the concern of the international community with regard to the situation of women (e.g. the Executive Director of UNICEF on behalf of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC)); the imminent appointment of a gender adviser and a human rights adviser within the Resident Coordinator's Office; the creation of a gender coordinating unit on the ground involving representatives from United

Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. Furthermore, gender training for staff is being planned, and the gender coordinating unit is in the process of establishing minimum standards of best practices for gender programming.

31. Building on the experience of ACC in developing a strategic framework for Afghanistan with a strong gender component, the Special Adviser participates in the ongoing efforts of the United Nations system, under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General, to develop generic guidelines for a strategic framework approach for response to and recovery from crisis situations, with a view to ensuring that any such framework adequately accommodates gender considerations.

32. Another example of increased attention to gender issues is the appointment, by the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) of a focal point on gender issues in ITU. The ITU Plenipotentiary Conference (12 October–6 November 1998), unanimously adopted resolution PLEN/1 on the inclusion of a gender perspective in the work of ITU. In that resolution, the Plenipotentiary Conference recognized specifically that ITU action was required in the light of the decision taken by the General Assembly to convene a special session in 2000. The conference also noted the need for ITU to investigate, analyse and further understand the impact of telecommunication technologies on women and men, and for a gender perspective to be included in all ITU policies, work programmes, information dissemination activities, publications, study groups, seminars and conferences. The Secretary-General of ITU was instructed to facilitate the work of the ITU Focal Point on Gender Issues and to ensure that a gender perspective was incorporated in the work programmes and leadership and human resources development activities of all sectors; and to report to the next Plenipotentiary Conference on the results and progress made. The ITU secretariat is developing a work plan to implement the resolution and the decision on the appointment of the focal point. This is expected to include a seminar or panel discussion in conjunction with the ITU Council meeting at Geneva in June 1999.

33. Ongoing attention is being paid to ensure that a gender perspective is adequately reflected in the work of UNDG, in particular in areas such as the UNDAF process, common country assessments, and the development of an indicator framework. The establishment by UNDG of a Gender Sub-Group, chaired by UNIFEM, provides a mechanism to monitor, and to provide input and guidance to UNDG. The Division for the Advancement of Women is a member of the Gender Sub-Group.

34. Cooperation continued between the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) on the joint project WomenWatch, a United Nations Internet site on the advancement and empowerment of women. Following the endorsement of WomenWatch as an inter-agency project by the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality at its third session, the World Bank, UNDP (Sustainable Development Networking Programme and Gender in Development Programme) and the Spanish National Machinery have joined the site as contributing partners and are thus members of the WomenWatch Web Committee, which sets policy for the site. Other United Nations entities, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), have expressed interest in becoming contributing partners.

35. In September 1998, the Division for the Advancement of Women conducted the Women and Health On-line Dialogue. The purpose of the dialogue was to promote wider participation of women from different parts of the world in discussions about national health policies with a gender perspective. Conducted through e-mail and the Web, the dialogue included 217 participants from more than 20 countries, one third of whom were from developing countries. The discussion was summarized and presented to the Expert Group Meeting on Women and Health: Mainstreaming the Gender Perspective into the Health Sector, held at Tunis from 28 September to 2 October 1998.

36. The dialogue focused on the following topics: (a) access to and quality of health services, (b) health education and promotion, (c) medical education and research, (d) nursing, and (e) reform of the health sector. Participants identified gender bias as a persistent factor that affects women as health care providers as well as their access to health services and information. They called for a new health paradigm that adopts a life-cycle approach and also urged better collaboration among health professionals, women's NGOs and Governments. Participants also made specific recommendations to the United Nations in the area of access, nursing, medical education and health reform.

37. In the course of 1998, the WomenWatch project has received financial contributions for outreach and for a series of on-line conferences on the critical areas of concern to be conducted during 1999 and 2000, in preparation for the special session of the General Assembly.

C. ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality

38. Following the third session of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (IACWGE) (25–27 February 1998), inter-sessional work on a number of topics has been conducted by task managers, for presentation to and action by the Committee at its fourth session (23–26 February 1999). A series of informal meetings were held in New York during the year. An oral report on the fourth session will be presented to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-third session by the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, who also chairs the Committee. The Committee is expected to focus on the following items: preparations for the special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000, including issuance of an ACC statement as an input into that process; ongoing work on the compilation of good practices in the implementation of the Platform for Action and in gender mainstreaming; preparation of a review of the women-in-development/gender focal point function; compilation of a database on gender training materials; methodologies for gender impact analysis; and gender sensitivity of budget codes and programme classifications. As part of its fourth session, the Committee is also convening a workshop with a number of resident coordinators and agency field staff to engage in a dialogue at the implementation of the Platform for Action and gender mainstreaming.

39. Based on a decision of the Committee, which was endorsed by the Commission in its agreed conclusions on the human rights of women, the Division for the Advancement of Women organized a workshop on a rights-based approach to women's advancement and empowerment and gender equality. The workshop, which took place in Rome from 5 to 7 October 1998, was hosted by FAO. It brought together 74 participants from the United Nations system and from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) Working Party on Gender Equality. The workshop sought to review and clarify the rights-based approach to gender equality and its implications for policy and operations by bilateral and multilateral entities. The workshop contributed to the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

40. The workshop adopted a final communiqué summarizing the major conclusions and findings that emerged from the discussions and putting forward a number of specific recommendations. While agreeing that further efforts were required to specify the full implications of the rights-based approach to gender equality for policy-making and programming, the workshop made the following recommendations:

- Promote knowledge of human rights and concomitant obligations, and the indivisibility of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights;
- Promote the principle of gender equality as central to the realization of human rights;
- Promote an enabling environment in which women and girls can exercise choice;
- Promote the availability of and access to gender-specific information and statistics;
- Provide support for participation and local activism through capacity-building and institutional development;
- Strengthen the rights-based approach by increasing contacts between development specialists and human rights specialists, including those of the United Nations Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality and of the OECD/DAC Working Party on Gender Equality;
- Increase the use of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other human rights instruments, the work of the human rights treaty bodies and of special procedures as guidance for operational activities;
- Strengthen national and international mechanisms for monitoring and accountability;
- Support the incorporation of international human rights standards into national legal systems;
- Share best practices and lessons learned in regard to tools, methodologies and monitoring mechanisms;
- Strengthen coordination among the United Nations system, bilateral entities and other partners, including at the national level.

41. The meeting was structured into two parts. Part I reviewed the conceptual and legal dimensions of a rights-based approach and its gender dimensions, and discussed the rights-based approach as understood in bilateral and multilateral policies. Part II assessed the practical implications of a rights-based approach to gender equality based on examples and case studies from bilateral and multilateral agencies. The workshop benefited from a background paper prepared by Professor Savitri Goonesekere (University of Colombo, Sri Lanka), in cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of

Women, and from the guidance of Professor Cees Flinterman (University of Utrecht, Netherlands). In part II of the workshop, nine working groups dealt with the implications for programming of the rights-based approach for areas such as humanitarian assistance; women's right to food; and women's right to health. The impact of cultural particularities on rights-based programming for women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as a tool for rights-based programming were also discussed. A report on the proceedings of the meeting was compiled and made available by the Division for the Advancement of Women.

42. Following up on guidance provided by ACC concerning increased coordination of its standing subsidiary bodies, and on the discussions of the chairpersons of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ), IACWGE and the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) in the framework of the session of the Economic and Social Council on integrated conference follow-up in May 1998, the Special Adviser, in her capacity as Chairperson of IACWGE accepted an invitation by the Chairperson of CCPOQ and addressed the Consultative Committee at its thirteenth session, in September 1998. She called for a process of regular exchanges between the two committees so that issues of common concern, especially cross-sectoral issues, may be addressed in a more systematic and sustained way in the work of the two committees. Based on CCPOQ's mandate to promote complementarities between the normative/policy side and the operational side of the United Nations system for economic and social development, and on the mandate of IACWGE, she identified various areas for such increased cooperation, including reflection of gender in UNDAF and operational activities in general, gender in the work of the resident coordinator system, gender concerns in the strategic framework process and guidelines, including for crisis situations, gender considerations in poverty eradication; and indicators and data collection. It is expected that the Chairperson of CCPOQ will accept the invitation extended by the Chairperson of IACWGE and address IACWGE at its fourth session, in February 1999.

D. Reported activities of non-governmental organizations and other institutions of civil society

43. Since the issuance of the latest report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/53/308), a number of events have occurred at the international, regional and national levels under the auspices of non-governmental organizations. While these activities were not reported systematically to the Secretariat, some of them have been brought to the attention of the Division for the Advancement of Women and are noted here as examples of the widespread follow-up to the Conference by civil society.

44. Some of the reported follow-up efforts are local level activities, and others are national, regional or global level activities. An example of global efforts was a three-day seminar on the subject of post-Beijing follow-up hosted by the All China Women's Federation in June 1998. The seminar brought together representatives of women's groups from more than 30 countries worldwide, who reported on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action at the national level. The existing gap between the commitments made at the Beijing Conference and the reality of women, especially in poorer countries, was discussed.

45. A seminar entitled "Making democracy work: strategies for empowering women in political and public life", organized by the British Council, was held in Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, from 30 August to 5 September 1998. With the aim of promoting the latest knowledge and advances made in social development and gender, the seminar was attended by representatives of women's rights groups and government agencies, academics, lawyers and journalists from 31 countries, with approximately half of them from African countries.

46. At the regional level, the Women's Programme of the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education and the Gender and Education Office of the International Council for Adult Education jointly convened a Regional Consultation on Women's Education on 26 and 27 September 1998 in Hua Hin, Thailand. The consultation was intended to strategize further coordination between the two organizations in building leadership capacity of women educators and in following up, *inter alia*, the outcome of the Beijing Conference. It was reported at the consultation that the existence of monitoring and lobbying mechanisms supported by women's groups at the national level helped Governments follow their commitments made at the Beijing Conference.

47. The Second International Women and Water Conference was held at Kathmandu, from 30 August to 5 September 1998, sponsored by Business and Professional Women of Nepal (BPWN), the International Institute for Human Rights, Environment and Development (INURID)

and Women and Water, USA. The 20 women from rural Nepal people's organizations whose main daily duties include carrying water, were joined by 50 other women from urban Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Australia, Germany, Canada and the United States to discuss the future of clean water at both the local and global levels. Participants agreed to stage a Women's World Water Day on the eve of World Water Day, 21 March 1999.

48. Efforts to expand and promote the well-being and the rights of young women have been gaining worldwide support. Emphasis was placed on educating and training adolescent girls as future leaders and equal participants in decision-making at a regional summer camp organized by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Cyprus in August 1998. Participants were young women from Egypt, Greece, Jordan and Lebanon, as well as young Palestinian women. The goal of this camp was to prepare young women for responsible participation at decision-making levels. The YWCA also conducted a workshop in Kenya from 9 to 13 March 1998, bringing together 30 young women from all over the country. The workshop was aimed at enhancing the awareness among young women of their human rights and the impact of violence against women.

49. The Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning, Inc. has produced three video films advocating for the need for adolescent sexual and reproductive health programmes in Asia. Based on actual stories of three girls from Nepal, Viet Nam and the Philippines, the films address the issues of early marriage, unwanted pregnancy and unwanted delivery from the viewpoint of the adolescents themselves. The video films were designed to help policy makers understand the situation and problems surrounding adolescent girls and to develop appropriate policies to respond to their needs.

50. The Internet has become a preferred means of communication and forum for the exchange of information among women and women's groups worldwide. Although the Internet is still not accessible to many of the women in the South, the number of Web sites in the developing world addressing women's issues is rapidly growing. Furthermore, these Web sites are expanding their capacities, including on-line conferences, and are providing assistance to users. For example, it was reported to the Division for the Advancement of Women in September 1998 that the Women'sNet, a networking Web site initiated in South Africa, had started a new e-mail list to keep people up to date on the latest happenings at Women'sNet.

51. A growing interest in the use of information and media as tools to advance the status of women and to eliminate gender stereotypes has been further explored at various international conferences. A conference entitled "Know How Conference on the World of Women's Information" was held in the Netherlands from 22 to 26 August 1998. The objective of the Conference was to improve the visibility and accessibility of women's information at the global and local levels and to develop a strategy whereby women involved in information could promote the empowerment of women at the global level. The Conference, which brought together about 300 women and men from 83 countries, including information specialists, librarians and women and gender specialists in the field of women's information, adopted a draft declaration to further the cause. The International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement, the organizer of the Conference, has started a new database called "Mapping the World of Women's Information", which is an inventory of women's information services available throughout the world. It also provides gender-specific information and connects government policy agendas with those of civil society.

52. Taking their cue from the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, which, for the first time, included media as a separate area of concern, the World Association for Christian Communication has organized a series of regional consultations aiming to bring together media practitioners, policy makers, activists and specialists. The latest in the series of conferences on gender and communication policy was held in Kingston, Jamaica, from 19 to 21 November 1998, to analyse key issues in gender representation and participation in the media.

III. Joint work plan of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

53. In resolution 39/5 of the Commission on the Status of Women and resolution 1997/43 of the Commission on Human Rights, the Secretary-General was requested to prepare annually a joint work plan for the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In resolution 1998/51, the Commission on Human Rights requested that the joint work plan reflect all aspects of the work under way, and identify existing obstacles/impediments and areas for further collaboration. In the conclusions on the human rights of women (Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/12, sect. III) prepared by the Commission on the Status of

Women, the two offices were requested to continue to prepare the joint annual work plan and strengthen cooperation and coordination in human rights activities, in particular (a) by collaborating in the writing of reports for the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights; (b) through sharing information systematically on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, its sessions and documentation, in order to ensure that its work will be better integrated into the work of the other treaty bodies and United Nations human rights activities; and (c) through capacity-building to implement agreed conclusions 1997/2 of the Economic and Social Council on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system, in particular training and gender sensitization especially of human rights monitors.

A. Assessment of the implementation of the current work plan

54. In the implementation of the current joint work plan (see E/CN.6/1998/2/Add.1, paras. 13–23), the systematic exchange of information between the Office of the High Commissioner and the Division for the Advancement of Women continued and was expanded in the course of 1998. The Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women addressed the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fourth session. In the course of the year, the Special Adviser met several times with the High Commissioner, and also met with the newly appointed Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. She participated in a special discussion, chaired by the High Commissioner, of senior United Nations officials on the occasion of the consideration, by the Economic and Social Council in its coordination segment in July 1998, of the follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Staff of the Division participated in several meetings held at the United Nations Office at Geneva, including the ninth and tenth meetings of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies. Division staff provided inputs to and contributed to the servicing of the Human Rights Committee during its New York session in March/April 1998. The Division facilitated the participation of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women in a panel discussion on women's human rights at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights.

55. The High Commissioner for Human Rights addressed the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women served on the panel on the critical area of concern "violence against women", held at that session. Staff of the Office of the High Commissioner participated in the 1998 session of the open-ended working group of the Commission on the Status of Women on the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and in the forty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The newly appointed Chief of the Programmes and Activities Branch of the Office of the High Commissioner met with Division staff during a mission to New York, and contributed to the workshop on a rights-based approach to the empowerment and advancement of women and gender equality.

56. The Division and the Office of the High Commissioner jointly prepared a report on women's real enjoyment of their human rights, in particular those relating to the elimination of poverty, economic development and economic resources (E/CN.4/1998/22–E/CN.6/1998/11), which was submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session and the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fourth session. The Division contributed substantive input and participated in inter-agency activities (representing the Department of Economic and Social Affairs) for the five-year review of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The Division also provided routine contributions to a number of reports of the Office of the High Commissioner on an ad hoc or as requested basis. It also provided input to the work of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions.

57. The Division continued to provide input into the joint project on the integration of a gender perspective into technical and advisory services of the Office of the High Commissioner and chaired the technical meeting to finalize the fourth phase of the project. Follow-up activities include the development, in July 1998, of detailed guidelines on gender and the human rights of women for use by Office staff and consultants in the preparation and execution of all seminars and training activities. The guidelines prepared are currently being field tested by the Office. Similar guidelines for evaluating technical cooperation projects will be developed in the first quarter of 1999. These guidelines will feed into ongoing efforts to improve the methodology of the technical cooperation programme, including the revision of training and support materials. The Division will remain involved in the follow-up to this project.

58. In response to a request of the meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies, endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 52/118, the Division for the Advancement of Women prepared a study on the integration

of a gender perspective in the work of the human rights treaty bodies, and submitted it to the tenth meeting of the chairpersons (HRI/MC/1998/6). The chairpersons strongly endorsed the report and emphasized the usefulness of such a comprehensive study to the work of the treaty bodies, in particular in assessing current practices and in identifying and focusing on areas of improvement for the future (A/53/432, para. 53).

59. In commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a number of activities were implemented. Based on a decision of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, the Division for the Advancement of Women organized a workshop on a rights-based approach to the empowerment and advancement of women and gender equality for members of the Committee and of the OECD/DAC Working Party on Gender Equality. The workshop sought to review and clarify the rights-based approach to gender equality and its implications for policy and operations by bilateral and multilateral entities. It contributed to the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The workshop adopted a final communiqué summarizing the major conclusions and findings that emerged from the discussions and putting forward a number of specific recommendations. A report on the workshop was compiled and edited by the Division and widely distributed (further details on the workshop are contained in paras. 39–41 of the present report).

60. A second information kit for the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights entitled "Women's rights — the responsibility of all", was produced by the Office of the High Commissioner, with a substantial contribution from the Division for the Advancement of Women. The feature article of the kit examines and analyses the role of the United Nations in promoting the human rights of women. It also contains information on the activities of the United Nations system relating to the rights of women that were carried out in 1998.

B. Joint work plan for 1999

61. The Division and the Office of the High Commissioner will continue the targeted approach of the 1998 work plan. Major emphasis will be placed on the areas indicated below.

62. During 1999, the cooperation between the Division and the Office of the High Commissioner on the work of treaty bodies will continue. Work will also continue on the electronic database covering all six treaty bodies with a view to eliminating technical difficulties and making the database fully operational and accessible for both offices. The Division will continue to update its Web site (www.un.org/womenwatch/daw) to make information related to the human rights of women and to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women easily accessible. It will continue to provide the Committee's concluding comments and general recommendations to the Office of the High Commissioner so that they can be made available promptly to the treaty bodies. The Division will ensure that its biannual briefing notes on the Committee's work will be supplied to the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies. The Office of the High Commissioner will provide the Division with the core documents of States parties and with the concluding comments and general recommendations of the treaty bodies for the information of Committee members. The Office will also continue to update its Web site (www.unhchr.ch) to make information on human rights, in particular the human rights of women, accessible. It will continue to provide information to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and will inform human rights mechanisms of activities relating to the human rights of women.

63. In follow-up to the positive reception by the tenth meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies of the Division study on the integration of a gender perspective in the work of the treaty bodies, the study has been posted on the Division's Web site, and will be widely distributed to the members of the treaty bodies, delegations and other interested actors. The Division will continue to monitor progress in the work of treaty bodies in integrating a gender perspective and provide gender-specific input into their work. In this regard, support will be provided in the elaboration of general comments, and in the revision of reporting guidelines to reflect gender concerns.

64. The Division will provide targeted input into the work of non-conventional human rights mechanisms. During 1999, particular emphasis will be placed on supporting the work of the Special Rapporteurs of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women, on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and on education.

65. The Division and the Office of the High Commissioner will support and facilitate the improved cooperation between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights, building on the first dialogue held in 1998 between the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights, and the participation of the High Commissioner, in 1998, in the Commission on the Status of Women, and of the

Special Adviser, also in 1998, in the Commission on Human Rights.

66. The information exchange between the Division and the Office of the High Commissioner on planned and ongoing research and study projects will be improved. Cooperation will also be improved in the area of report preparation. With regard to the comprehensive report on violence against women migrant workers requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/97 for submission to it at its fifty-fourth session, in 1999, and the comprehensive report, also on violence against women migrant workers, requested by the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 1998/17 for submission to it at its fifty-sixth session, in 2000, these reports will be prepared by the Division and the Office together. The Division will contribute, on an ad hoc basis and as appropriate, information for reports on general human rights issues and for reports on the human rights of women prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner. The Office of the High Commissioner will contribute, on an ad hoc basis and as appropriate, to the preparation by the Division of reports or studies on gender and women's rights issues. The Division and the Office of the High Commissioner will continue to cooperate in exchanging information on communications in connection with the communications procedure of the Commission on the Status of Women.

67. The issue of traffic in women and girls will receive particular attention in 1999. The High Commissioner has identified trafficking in women and children for purposes of sexual exploitation as a priority issue. The Office of the High Commissioner has set up a project aimed at raising awareness on the issue at the highest political level. Efforts will be made better to support implementation of relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights. Cooperation will be sought with the Centre for International Crime Prevention at the United Nations Office at Vienna to cover action to combat international trafficking in women and children. Both the Division and the Office of the High Commissioner will contribute to the study on the criminal aspects of trafficking in human beings, which is being prepared by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute on behalf of the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention.

68. The Division and the Office of the High Commissioner will hold a workshop to follow up the expert group meeting on the development of guidelines for the integration of gender perspectives into United Nations human rights activities and programmes, which was held in 1995 (see E/CN.4/1996/105). The workshop, which had already been foreseen in the 1998 workplan, is tentatively scheduled to take place in April 1999. The workshop, for which extrabudgetary resources will be sought, will assess the impact of the first meeting and consider further strategies required to integrate a gender perspective into United Nations human rights activities. The study on the integration of a gender perspective in the work of the human rights treaty bodies (HRI/MC/1998/6) will serve as a background paper for the workshop.

69. In follow-up to the conclusions and recommendations emanating from the joint project on the integration of a gender perspective in technical and advisory services of the Office of the High Commissioner, that Office will organize a strategy meeting with outside experts to discuss the current situation with regard to gender and to elaborate a gender strategy for the Office. The Division for the Advancement of Women will contribute to the conceptualization and implementation of this strategy meeting. It is foreseen that it will be organized back-to-back with the gender integration workshop discussed in paragraph 68 above.

70. The Division and the Office of the High Commissioner will discuss opportunities for cooperation in the area of national machineries for the advancement of women and national human rights institutions, in particular in technical and advisory services aimed at the establishment and/or strengthening of national institutions. A technical meeting between staff of both the Division and the Office will review the current status of activities in the Division and the Office with regard to national institutions and develop a project proposal for joint activities in this field.

71. The Division and the Office of the High Commissioner will develop a training module/framework on the human rights of women and on gender mainstreaming in human rights activities and programmes. Such a training module/framework would be used in conjunction with any human rights-related training activity for United Nations staff and mission training for peacekeepers and human rights field monitors, and also serve as specialized training in human rights of women for human rights experts such as special rapporteurs. The training would be intended to cover both human rights of women and gender mainstreaming in human rights.

72. The Office of the High Commissioner will continue to seek the Division's comments on all training materials under production, with a view to ensuring adequate inclusion of issues related to the human rights of women and gender mainstreaming. The Division has so far provided input for the draft Training Manual on Human Rights Monitoring prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner, and on

the joint Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Module on Gender in Peacekeeping, which are currently being produced.

73. The Office of the High Commissioner, in organizing training courses on reporting under human rights treaties, as well as other ad hoc activities, will continue to invite the Division for the Advancement of Women to participate. The Office of the High Commissioner will contribute to the work of the open-ended working group on an optional protocol at its next session (March 1999) and to its follow-up. The Office will also continue to participate actively in selected meetings organized by the Division. The Division will contribute to, and participate in, selected meetings of human rights bodies, in particular the meeting of persons chairing treaty bodies, and meetings organized by the Office of the High Commissioner. Both the Division and the Office will contribute to the follow-up to the Rome workshop, in the framework of the ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality.

IV. Information supplied in accordance with specific mandates

A. Situation of Palestinian women and assistance provided by organizations of the United Nations system

74. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1998/10, requested a report on the situation of Palestinian women and assistance provided by organizations of the United Nations system. The present report covers the period from September 1997 to September 1998[2] and is based on information from United Nations bodies monitoring the situation of Palestinians in the occupied territories as well as in refugee camps. Such bodies include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories and the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967. Information on assistance to Palestinian women was requested from the United Nations system and replies from 15 entities have been included in the present report.[3]

1. Situation of Palestinian women

75. According to the 1997 Palestinian Population, Housing and Establishment Census,[4] women constitute 49.2 per cent of the total Palestinian population of 2,895,683. The census classifies 64 per cent of the labour force as being economically inactive and women, as housewives, constitute 43.7 per cent of the economically inactive. This means that women constitute 28 per cent of the total labour force which is engaged in unpaid work. This might explain why women constitute only 16.3 per cent of the total number of people engaged in the private sector. The census also shows that 20.1 per cent of women are illiterate, compared with 7.7 per cent of men, and that the fertility rate is 6.1 per cent.

76. In his report on economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza, the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO) stated that in comparison with 1996, there was an overall improvement in economic performance in the West Bank and Gaza during 1997. This was due, in part, to the fact that 1997 had fewer closure days than 1996, which was reflected in enhanced labour and trade flow between the West Bank and Gaza and Israel. However, this relative improvement must be seen in the context of the continuation of the general, comprehensive and internal closure policies which have caused a decline in incomes in the past several years. Lost income as a result of closures has been estimated at about US$ 4 million per effective closure day, amounting to about US$ 228 million in 1997 which is about half the value of donor disbursements for the year.[5]

77. The daily life of women continues to be adversely affected by the Israeli occupation, particularly by the imposition of security-related measures such as closures, which have a detrimental impact on their socio-economic condition. As in the past, Palestinian women are experiencing the gender-specific impact of these measures, which is reinforced by existing inequalities in society between women and men. Frequent Israeli closures have been a major factor behind the 18 per cent drop in the gross national product (GNP) of the West Bank and Gaza and the 35 per cent drop in per capita GNP between 1992 and 1996. The gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated by the Palestinian Authority and the International Monetary Fund to have grown by 1.2 per cent in 1997, down from 5.5 per cent in 1996.[6]

78. This socio-economic situation is reflected in household expenditures. There was an overall real decline of 2.3 per cent in average household consumption expenditures between the first and fourth quarters of 1997.[7] Given existing gender inequality, resulting in women's weaker

negotiating capacity, any cut in household expenditure tends to hurt women and girls disproportionately. Furthermore, women's average labour force participation rate declined from 13 per cent in 1996 to 12.3 per cent in 1997, which is a relative decline of 5.8 per cent for women compared with a relative decline of 1.5 per cent for men. Further, women's full employment rates and the total number of fully employed women also fell in 1997, while those for men rose considerably. Also in 1997, women's average unemployment rate increased from 20.6 to 21.4 per cent.[8]

79. In his report to the Commission on Human Rights, Mr. Hannu Halinen (Finland), the Special Rapporteur on Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967, stated that the lack of income and inability to buy food during closures of the occupied territories have reportedly led many families to eat only one meal a day and to significantly reduce their intake of protein.[9] An increase in malnutrition has been registered among pregnant women and pre-school age children who are suffering from iron and iodine deficiencies.[10] The phenomenon of malnourishment among children in the Gaza Strip was also reported by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.[11]

80. The Special Rapporteur also noted that approximately 3,500 Palestinian prisoners, seven of whom were women, were held in Israeli prisons and detention centres in violation of articles 49 and 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. This remains a persistent source of concern and tension in the occupied territories.[12]

81. In Gaza, the Special Rapporteur met with some former detainees and with the mothers and relatives of Palestinian prisoners. He was informed about the economic and social hardships suffered by the prisoners' families, particularly if the prisoners were the main breadwinners. The families also complained of the frequent transfer of prisoners in Israel, which made family visits difficult. Family visits to prisoners were also hindered by difficulties in obtaining security clearance by relatives and the humiliating searches they undergo merely to spend 45 minutes with the prisoners in groups of 10.[13]

82. The Special Rapporteur also mentioned the situation of former prisoners who have undergone torture while in detention. They suffer from psychological consequences, such as chronic post-traumatic stress and depression. Many, as a result, behave violently towards their wives and children.[14] The wives and children of workers who are unable to go to Israel or find employment locally also tend to be victims of domestic violence. This phenomenon of domestic violence, due to the above factors, was also reported by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.[15]

83. In its report, the Special Committee noted reports on "arbitrariness" in obtaining travel permits to enter Israel. There are no written rules issued by the Israeli authorities that govern the granting to Palestinians of permits and authorizations to enter Israel. Moreover, travel by Palestinians is accompanied by humiliation, especially of women, at checkpoints and border crossings, physical violence and the likelihood of being stranded in another part of the occupied territories in case of closure.[16]

84. The Special Committee also reported that a newborn baby died on 26 August 1998 because of delays at an Israeli Army roadblock near Hebron, in the West Bank. The mother gave birth in her car after soldiers at an Israeli military checkpoint forced her to take a longer route to a Hebron hospital.[17]

2. United Nations assistance to Palestinian women

85. Information provided by the United Nations system shows continuing support for Palestinian women by the United Nations, as well as increasing efforts of gender mainstreaming by the programmes and funds. However, the information available is not fully differentiated in terms of the extent of support to the different groups of Palestinian women, namely, women in Palestinian self-rule areas, women in occupied areas, and women in refugee camps.

86. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) continued its four-year, $7.2 million Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People which commenced in 1996. The programme focused on three areas of assistance: reproductive health including family planning, population and development strategies, and advocacy. As part of this programme in the West Bank town of Jenin, UNFPA trained a team of 20 female and 10 male educators, to reach out to rural women and men in order to inform them about reproductive health issues, distribute oral contraceptives among them and refer them to clinics to obtain services. This was part of a project serving some 18,000 married women and their husbands and helped to upgrade the capacity of 20 clinics to provide quality reproductive health services and counselling.

87. UNFPA is currently supporting the establishment of a multidisciplinary women's centre at the Jabalia refugee camp, which is due to become operational in December 1998. The centre will provide a comprehensive package of reproductive health information and services covering the

life cycle of women, as well as social assistance, legal counselling and community education on various issues such as domestic violence and women's rights, including reproductive rights. A similar UNFPA-funded centre at the Al Burej refugee camp was visited by 13,000 clients during 1997.

88. The World Health Organization (WHO) is assisting with the consolidation of the Women's Health Development Department at the Ministry of Health of the Palestinian Authority as well as with the implementation of two reproductive health projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These projects, funded by UNFPA, aim at reducing maternal mortality by 50 per cent, introducing family planning counselling and screening in 50 per cent of all health facilities, increasing the contraceptive prevalence rate to 25 per cent, and providing post-natal care to all women by the year 2000.

89. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) provided assistance to Palestinian women through the following three programme areas: advocacy and capacity-building; health and nutrition; and basic education. During 1997, the UNICEF office for Gaza and the West Bank conducted a Gender Audit of four projects with a view to assessing the extent to which UNICEF's global commitment to addressing gender concerns was reflected in local level project activities. Following the audit, two workshops were held to share the findings with 100 key policy makers and professionals in order to raise awareness of gender mainstreaming in programming. The report of the audit as well as the workshops was issued by UNICEF's Gender and Partnership Section.

90. The UNICEF Women's Health Project involves the development of policies and procedures on key women's health issues and upgrading of services and human resources at the Ministry of Health of the Palestinian Authority. During the period 1997/98, 60 health professionals at the Ministry of Health were trained in the management of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS prevention, as well as in cervical cancer and breast cancer screening. During April 1998, a one-day campaign on Safe Motherhood, as part of the Safe Motherhood Day celebrations, was carried out involving all health providers in the West Bank and Gaza.

91. As part of the Basic Education programme, UNICEF is at present conducting operational research on early marriage and school drop-outs. The results will be discussed with top policy makers in the education sector. In addition, there is an ongoing project — the Better Parenting Initiative — on parenting skills, covering such issues as early marriage, gender equality and child labour. This project now targets both mothers and fathers through male and female social workers.

92. The United Nations Volunteers are implementing the Community-based Youth Participation and Development Project, which aims at promoting the human development of young people, in particular young women, to be full participants in and contributors to the development of the Palestinian society. So far 21 United Nations Volunteers (2 international and 19 national volunteers) have worked directly or indirectly towards improving the situation of Palestinian women as women's health specialists, community health workers, coordinators of community activity centres.

93. As part of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) International Programme for More and Better Jobs for Women, a draft Action Plan for the West Bank and Gaza Strip has been formulated on the basis of a series of consultations between ILO, representatives of various ministries of the Palestinian Authority and employers and workers organizations, as well as other social partners. The draft Action Plan will include the development of a gender-sensitive labour market information system, which will improve gender disaggregated data collection, analysis and dissemination.

94. The draft Action Plan includes vocational training of about 100 women in the tourist sector and of about 200 women engaged in the informal handicrafts sector in the Bethlehem district. In the Gaza Strip, the programme targets about 300 women in poor rural areas to ensure their remunerative and viable employment. This involves the organization of the women in local support facilities and networks, training and the setting up of a viable savings and credit scheme.

95. Other ILO activities include the promotion of the socio-economic status of Palestinian women and the promotion and development of Palestinian women's entrepreneurship. For example, a two-week course was organized at the ILO Training Centre in Turin for 14 Palestinian women representing non-governmental organizations and women's associations active in the promotion of human and women's rights during the period of 24 November to 5 December 1997. From 15 June to 3 July 1998 another training course was implemented at the centre for 13 women and men representing the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions. At the end of the course, participants formulated a national strategy for the promotion of women workers' rights. In addition, two training activities on costing and pricing were implemented for 20 women

entrepreneurs in the territories under the Palestinian Authority, from 25 August to 5 September 1998.

96. The International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO conducted a project on export development and the promotion of high-value floricultural products from the Gaza and West Bank, which included a survey on the role of Palestinian women in the floriculture industry. The survey, which was completed in June 1998, assessed the extent to which certain gender-specific factors determine how Palestinian women perceive and articulate their development needs and how they participate in contemporary development activities (particularly those related to the floriculture industry).

97. As part of its ongoing development assistance to the occupied Palestinian territories, the World Bank invited the Director of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, which represents a number of Palestinian women's organizations in the occupied territories, to a Gender Training Workshop for Bank staff. The discussion revolved around how the Bank and women's organizations active on the ground can learn from each other and work together to promote the socio-economic, political and legal status of Palestinian women.

98. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme, is implementing a project designed to give policy and institutional support to the recently established General Directorate for Policies, Planning and Development of the Ministry of Agriculture. This directorate has a newly established Gender in Development Unit. This unit will assist rural women through awareness campaigns and gender-oriented training.

99. As part of its Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, UNDP supported the establishment of a Gender Statistics Unit within the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Training for staff within the unit and the Bureau itself focused on assisting staff in selecting gender-significant indicators, formulating gender-sensitive surveys and questionnaires and evaluating statistics for accuracy in reflecting the actual situation of women within society.

100. Furthermore, UNDP in conjunction with the Inter-Ministerial Committee of the Palestinian Authority, created a Rural Girls Development Centre. The Centre provides general education and comprehensive training in the areas of health and agriculture. During 1997, training was offered for 27 young rural women. A second phase of this project aims at creating a mechanism by which the Rural Girls Development Centre will be able to sustain itself, further develop the curriculum and initiate small projects for the graduates to create long-term income-generating activities.

101. In addition, UNDP has engaged a local Palestinian non-governmental organization to carry out a comprehensive study on the status of women in the occupied Palestinian territories in relation to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

102. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has supported the establishment of a Women and Group Rights Unit within the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights in Gaza to work with the local community in support of the development of a favourable women's rights policy environment. The Women and Group Rights Unit's legal aid programme has provided direct legal counselling to individuals and intervened on behalf of women in the *Sharia* courts in Gaza in cases of separation, divorce, child visitation and *nafaqa* (alimony). It has also provided legal advice to women prisoners and other women's organizations and their constituents. In addition, the Unit has produced a series of guides on such issues as marriage law, divorce and inheritance.

103. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights also supports non-governmental contributions to the legal reform process through a grant to a Gaza-based organization, Mashraqiyyat, to enable it to contribute to the development of an equitable Personal Status Law. The focus is on the discourse and interpretations that deal with *Sharia*-based concerns.

104. The United Nations Development Fund for Women implements its empowerment agenda for women through three programme areas: strengthening women's economic capacity, engendering governance and leadership, and promoting women's human rights. As part of the celebrations marking both the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, UNIFEM is launching a Global Campaign for the Eradication of Violence Against Women. For Palestinian women, this will involve a public march in the West Bank, film shows and plays, radio campaigns, high school lectures, and round-table discussions with the Palestinian Working Women's Centre, the Women's Studies Centre, the Women's Legal and Social Counselling Centre as well as the Women's Affairs Technical Committee.

105. As part of its activities to follow up the Fourth World Conference on Women, UNIFEM has assisted the Inter-Ministerial Committee of the Palestinian Authority and the General Union of Palestinian Women in preparing a national strategy for the advancement of women. UNIFEM is now

assisting these two Palestinian entities in the implementation of the strategy.

106. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has invited Palestinian women to participate in the World Conference on Education. However, the UNESCO strategy is geared towards integrating Palestinian women's concerns in its assistance work, which includes granting scholarships through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

107. The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, in conjunction with UNFPA, executed the first population and housing census project of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and provided technical support during all the preparatory activities and the field operations. Data from the census will, as far as possible, be disaggregated by gender.

108. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia seeks to mainstream a gender perspective in its activities focused on supporting the economic and social situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and to provide advisory services and technical assistance services. ESCWA organized an Expert Group meeting on the role of women's non-governmental organizations in the economy of the occupied territories in December 1997 at Bir Zeit University.

109. UNRWA continues to provide assistance to Palestinian refugees in keeping with its mandate. That assistance includes the programme areas of education, health, relief and social services, income generation, peace implementation, and the Lebanon Appeal (which targets the refugees in Lebanon who are hardest hit). Women refugees are direct or indirect beneficiaries of these programmes. For example, in the education programme, which accounted for 50 per cent of the total budget of UNRWA in 1998, women accounted for 62 per cent of all trainees enrolled in technical/semi-professional courses in 1997/98. Of the 1,055 scholarships granted during 1997/98 by UNRWA to refugee students, 46 per cent went to women students. UNRWA, as part of its income-generation programme, granted loans valued at $2.7 million to 3,296 women who supported some 16,310 dependants. Those women were organized into 525 solidarity groups, which were part of the solidarity group lending programme, serving as a guarantee mechanism. This programme has a repayment rate of 98 per cent.

3. Conclusions

110. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action confirmed the human rights of women and of the girl child to be an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. Furthermore it obligates Governments and the international community to seek and ensure the full and equal participation of women in all spheres of life, as well as the eradication of all forms of discrimination on the basis of sex. The eradication of discrimination against women is fully elaborated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which 163 Member States have ratified. The principle of equality is inherent in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The principles enshrined in these documents are relevant to Palestinian women and intensified work is needed to fully implement them.

111. The Palestinian Authority and civil society, with the assistance of the international community, have taken considerable steps to advance the situation of Palestinian women. However, further efforts and assistance are needed, particularly within the context of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes as mandated by the Economic and Social Council in its agreed conclusions 1997/2. A sound information basis is essential for gender mainstreaming, therefore the efforts of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics to acquire and disseminate gender-disaggregated statistics wherever possible should be augmented by efforts on the part of United Nations bodies to keep gender disaggregated data on their operations. This will aid the reporting process considerably and enhance the effectiveness of support to Palestinian women.

112. A significant proportion of Palestinian women are refugees with acute basic needs. Yet there is insufficient information on their status and the kind of assistance they are receiving. The efforts of UNRWA, in keeping with its mandate in this area, are commendable, but they are also constrained by the debilitating financial crisis which the agency is facing. As reflected in previous reports, the status and situation of Palestinian women are inextricably linked to developments on the peace front. Progress in the peace process should be translated in tangible benefits for the people of the occupied territories and the refugee camps.

B. Release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned

113. The Commission on the Status of Women, at its forty-second session, adopted resolution 42/2 on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts, including those subsequently imprisoned. The Commission requested the Secretary-General to prepare, taking into account the information provided by Member States and

relevant international organizations, a report on the implementation of resolution 42/2 for submission to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-third session. A note verbale was sent to all Member States on 29 September 1998. As of 7 December 1998, the Secretariat had received five replies.

114. The Governments of Barbados and El Salvador reported that the situation described in Commission resolution 42/2 did not exist in their respective countries. The Government of Colombia confirmed its commitment to the resolution. However, it indicated that in the ongoing civil war, the armed groups opposed to the Government routinely detained civilians, including women, as part of their struggle. On 15 July 1998, one of the armed groups, the Army of National Liberation, signed an agreement with the National Committee for Peace and members of civil society, committing itself to stopping the practice of detaining civilians.

115. The Government of Croatia reported that the Governmental Commission for Imprisoned and Missing Persons has been conducting a search for 367 women who constitute 20.12 per cent of the total population of missing persons and persons forcibly taken away in the area of the Republic of Croatia during the war of 1991–1995.

116. The Government of Lebanon reported that three Lebanese women have been arrested by Israeli Intelligence and are currently in detention. One of the women is being held in Nablus prison in the occupied Palestinian territories. She has reportedly been tortured and suffers from severe head pains. The Government of Lebanon also reported that there are eight child prisoners in Israeli detention.

117. The Secretariat also requested information from relevant entities of the United Nations system. As of 7 December 1998, it had received five replies. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations provided information from three of its field missions. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon indicated that, in accordance with publicly available reports, there were three women prisoners in the Khiyam prison. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been dealing with the issue. The United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone reported that the rebels hold several thousands of civilian captives, women, men and children, who were used as porters, human shields and for forced sexual activity. The United Nations Liaison Office in Belgrade reported that, according to ICRC, nine women and four children under the age of 18 were missing in Kosovo. However it is not clear whether they were prisoners, abductees or just missing. ICRC was still seeking clarification of their fate. Furthermore, an estimated 521 Serbian women and 12 children have been missing since the 1991–1995 war in Croatia. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations stated, however, that the accuracy of these estimates could not be ascertained.

118. In their replies, the Department of Public Information and three regional commissions (ESCWA, ESCAP and ECA) did not provide any specific information on women and children taken hostage.

Notes

[1] Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (A/53/455–S/1998/913); interim report on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, prepared by Mr. Choong-Hyun Paik, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights (A/53/539); and report of the Secretary-General on emergency assistance for peace, normalcy and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, Afghanistan (A/53/346).

[2] That is, the period since the preparation of the previous report (E/CN.6/1998/2/Add.2).

[3] The 15 entities that replied are: the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Fund, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the World Bank, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Volunteers programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat.

[4] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the Demographic Survey in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Final Report (August, 1997).

[5] UNSCO, "Report on economic and social conditions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip" (Spring, 1998), p. ii.

[6] Note by the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/53/163–E/1998/79), para. 43.

[7] UNSCO, "Report on the economic and social conditions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip" (Spring, 1998), p. 29.

[8] Ibid., p. 23.

[9] Report on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, submitted by Mr. Hannu Halinen, Special Rapporteur pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1993/2 A (E/CN.4/1998/17), para. 37.

[10] Ibid., para. 35.

[11] Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/53/661), para. 128.

[12] Report on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 ..., para. 21.

[13] Ibid., para. 30.

[14] Ibid., para. 27.

[15] Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report to the Special Committee ..., para. 108.

[16] Ibid., paras. 70 and 83.

[17] Ibid., para. 90.